

## Safetv

Canoeing is an adventure sport and as such should be treated with respect. If you are new to the sport, it is advisable to contact a Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI) approved provider or club where expert coaching and local knowledge can be provided. Details can be found at www.cani.org.uk

- When taking part in canoeing consider the following safety advice: 1. Attending a recognised training course to develop skills and to acquire safety and environmental knowledge is very important for safely paddling on the coast.
- 2. It is recommended that canoeists consult the relevant Maps, Charts and Pilot and obtain up to date information on weather and tides before planning a trip on the sea.
- 3. CANI recommends that paddlers leave details of their journey with the Coastguard and with a responsible adult based on the shore.
- 4. Carry adequate basic safety equipment spare clothes, extra food, warm drink, form of shelter, First Aid kit, means of communication (VHF Radio, mobile phone), flares, torch and whistle. 5. Wear appropriate buoyancy in the form of a personal lifejacket
- or buoyancy aid. Canoe buoyancy should be sufficient to keep the canoe afloat if you capsize.
- 6. It is not recommended to canoe alone three boats is the minimum required for most rescues.
- 7. Be aware of other water users such as sailing boats, ferries and commercial shipping. Canoeists should make allowance for the limitations and needs of larger craft that are less maneuverable and may be restricted to deep water channels.
- 8. Fast ferries operate from Belfast Harbour and Larne Port. These approach very quickly and have a powerful wash.
- Paddlers should check ferry timetables before setting out. 9. Parts of the East Coast Canoe Trail, particularly The Maidens, Isle of Muck, Copeland Islands and Strangford, experience extremely powerful tidal currents and should only be tackled by appropriately experienced canoeists.
- 10. At busy harbours, canoeists should inform the Harbour Master of their approach.

#### Winds and Weather

The Shipping Forecast, Inshore Waters Forecast and Coastal Forecast can all be obtained from the BBC website news.bbc.co.uk/weather BBC radio 4 broadcast a shipping forecast four times daily – 0048hrs, 0520hrs, 1201hrs, 1754hrs. Sea area 'Irish Sea'

### Non-emergency contacts

Police non-emergency (Northern Ireland) Belfast Coastguard non-emergency +44 (0)28 9146 3933

#### Emergencies

In the event of an emergency - Dial 999 or 112 to contact Coastguard, police and ambulance. Use VHF Radio Channel 16 to contact Coastguard

#### Maps, charts and pilot Maps required

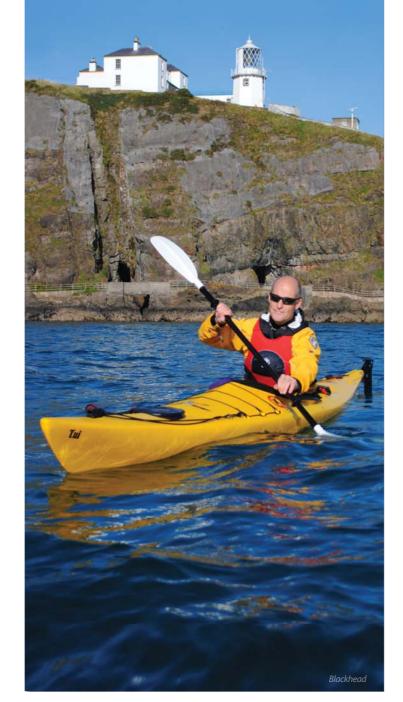
- OSNI Discoverer Map Series 1:50,000 Sheet 5 Ballycastle OSNI Discoverer Map Series 1:50,000 Sheet 9 Larne
- OSNI Discoverer Map Series 1:50,000 Sheet 15 Belfast OSNI Discoverer Map Series 1:50,000 Sheet 21 Strangford Lough
- Other useful maps OSNI Glens of Antrim Activity Map 1:25,000
- OSNI Strangford Lough Activity Map 1:25,000
- Admiralty Charts required
- No: 2198 North Channel Southern part
- No: 1753 Belfast Lough & Approaches
- No: 2159 Strangford Narrows **Other useful Charts -** No: 1237 Larne Lough & Approaches
- Publications required UKHO Irish Coast Pilot NP40. NP218 Tidal Stream Atlas North Coast of Ireland and West Coast
- Irish Cruising Club: Sailing Directions East and North Coast of Ireland



Exploring Northern Ireland's

# East Coast Canoe Trail

The East Coast Canoe Trail, approximately 70 nautical miles long, offers outstanding views of the Glens of Antrim, rugged cliffs and impressive sea caves. Negotiating choppy tide races to visit lighthouse islands and skirting hundreds of small reefs known as pladdies add spice to this journey.





The drama of chalk and basalt cliffs of the east County Antrim coast gives way to a low-lying rocky shore broken by numerous sandy beaches in County Down. The tidal range increases southwards to Strangford Lough. There are optional excursions out to islands such as The Maidens (County Antrim) and the Copelands (County Down) as well as the sheltered waters of Larne Lough, and the trail also takes you into and across Belfast Lough.

The starting point is at Waterfoot beach south of Cushendall and the route mirrors coastal roads most of the way to end at the turbulent narrows and the attractive village of Portaferry at the mouth of Strangford Lough. There is the choice to paddle the four sections in either direction, southwards as described here, or north.

Thus the East Coast Trail offers stretches of relatively easy paddling for the less experienced canoeist and, for the more adventurous, challenging tide races, overfalls and windswept island circuits. Seals, seabirds, an almost 500 million geological time span and a varied human history linked to nearby Scotland add interest to this side of the North Channel and Irish Sea. There is a good range of slipway access points, beach haul-outs and picturesque resting spots.



Collection Ulster Folk & Transport Museum"THE GOBBINS BRIDGE" a perspective view of the cliff path and tubular bridge with a man on the bridge for scale



Waterfoot to Ballygally (14NM) and The Maidens Islands (9NM return journey from Ballygally)



The East Coast Trail begins at Waterfoot beach at the base of Glenariff, as spectacular a setting as anyone could wish. There is a sizeable car park and easy beach access to Red Bay. At the outer edge of this bay, and further south off Glenarm, are the floating pens of salmon farms run by a local company. Young Atlantic salmon (smolts) are grown to marketable fish

from 3 to 5 kg weight within the cages. Yellow buoys mark these sites and maintenance vessels come and go constantly.

The tide race off Garron Point can throw up sharp waves in windy conditions, and keeping close inshore can help avoid the worst of this. From the rocky shore, paddlers can glimpse the rather sombre Garron Tower tucked behind the wooded slopes. This was built in 1848-49 for the Marchioness of Londonderry, and in its present extended state houses the local grammar School.

The cliff scenery from Waterfoot to just south of Glenarm is impressive; great slabs of vivid white chalk topped by rugged grey-black basalt. In many places the chalk rests on unstable sand or soft Lias clay and slippages occur. The distinctive stepped profile of Garron Point is due to slumped chalk and basalt cliffs, while at Madman's Window car park a little south of Glenarm the recent collapse of a large chalk outcrop has left rubble and some blocks the size of a small house lying close to the coast road – the scar on the hillside is very obvious.

Both Carnlough and Glenarm have small and sheltered harbours. The former has a good slipway for landing and the village offers plenty of choices for refreshments, from chippies to the old Londonderry Arms Hotel, once owned by Sir Winston Churchill.

Coming ashore at Glenarm is at an easy beach landing at the car park close to the parish Church. Note the salmon cages offshore, as mentioned earlier. There's a tearoom, open from May to September, in the nearby walled garden of Glenarm Castle.



From the sea, the scars of now disused chalk quarries can be seen behind both Carnlough and Glenarm. The former's harbour was busy in the nineteenth century with shipping carrying this white limestone to Scotland where most of it ended up used in the north of England iron smelting industry. There are many pleasure craft based in these harbours, but also a few lobster, crab and scallop fishing boats, reminders of once thriving fishing communities. For many years, wild salmon were netted off Carnlough, but this fishery is now closed.

The hinterland south of Glenarm to Ballygally is sheep pasture, rising gently to a wooded escarpment, above which lies the extensive blanket bog and moorland of the Garron Plateau. This is as close to wilderness as can be found in Northern Ireland, a place populated by Irish hares and soaring buzzards. The shoreline along this part of the coast is also less rugged, a salt and pepper mix of boulders and stones of chalk and basalt. A narrow fringe of underwater kelp "forests" exists where a stony seabed provides holdfasts for these brown and red seaweeds.

The approach to **Ballygally** is marked by the rounded rocky headland - some say this exhibits the profile of a sleeping man's face. There is a beach landing just south of Ballygally Castle Hotel and a good slipway at the car park a little further south. Ballygally slipway is a good embarkation for a circuit of The Maidens lighthouse islands, lying just over 4 NM offshore.

The tide sets strongly at approx 5 – 6 knots around The Maidens – and given its distance off shore – this trip should only be undertaken by experienced and competent paddlers who have a good working knowledge of coastal and off shore navigation. If visiting The Maidens, stay north of Ballygally Head to avoid shipping plying in and out of Larne port. Landing on the West Maiden is tricky, and is best on the rock shelves on the west side. The East Maiden has steps and rock shelves where landing is possible at the north-west and south-east corners. Strong tidal streams do not make these landings easy. Bear in mind that the East Maidens lighthouse still operates and is the property of the Dublin-based Commissioners of Irish Lights. These lighthouses began working in 1829 but the West Maidens light (actually on the north island) was abandoned in 1903. The East Maidens lighthouse was modernised and eventually became automated in 1977, resulting in the lighthouse keepers leaving the station. It's been reported that The Maidens Rock was never a popular posting amongst the lighthouse-keeping fraternity, a location known as a "hardship station", although a lot less remote than some offshore lighthouses around Ireland. Now seals and seabirds have taken over the islands, and this part of the North Channel is a good spot to look out for porpoises and other cetaceans.





### Ballygally to Carrickfergus (18NM)

Passing round Ballygally Head there is a small island with the remains of a castle's walls, possibly built by Anglo-Normans in the early thirteenth century. There is a legend that a prince tried to keep his beautiful daughter in isolation here to prevent her from being carried off by a suitor of whom he disapproved, but the match was successfully made despite his efforts.



The Bay of the Blackthorns, or **Drains Bay** in its less attractive anglicised name, has a well provisioned car park and the beach landing is opposite this at a narrow sandy break on the stony shoreline.

Blackcave Tunnel at the south end of the bay is an icon of the Antrim Coast Road. This challenging route between Larne and Ballycastle was accomplished over the years 1832-1842, engineered by William Bald and built with the labour of many glens men from the hinterland.

The views seawards down this coast, on a clear day, include the coast of north County Down and the Copeland Islands, as well as the Ayrshire and Galloway coastline of Scotland and the domed granite lump of Ailsa Craig island, breeding place of thousands of gannets.

The tall chimneys of Ballylumford Power Station mark the narrow entrance to Larne Lough and opposite is the busy harbour of Larne with its ferry links to Scotland.

# **Crossing Port of Larne Controlled Waters**

The crossing from Larne town to Islandmagee is relatively short however these are very busy waters with commercial shipping and numerous fast ferry services operating daily. As such, canoeists are advised to contact Port of Larne Control either by VHF Channel 14, or phone, before setting off for advice on the best time and location to cross. When travelling south contact should be made on reaching Blackcave Head, when travelling north, Skernaghan Point.



An excursion into the sheltered waters of Larne Lough offers easier paddling and the seaward half of the Lough is best, as further in it narrows and extensive mudflats are exposed at low tide. On the inland hillside is the great stepped gash of the now disused Magheramourne Quarry, while the eastern profile is of the beautiful Islandmagee - a peninsula rather than an island.

Brown's Bay and the tiny and scenic Portmuck (Muck is derived from the Irish for pig) are good beach landings with car parks and shore facilities. This coastline is a mix of chalk and basalt, but the latter dominates the coast past the headland at Portmuck where there is a strong tide race. The Isle of Muck lies close to shore, linked at low water by a tombolo or natural causeway. At high water – a more sheltered channel can be taken between the island and the mainland shore – but at low water this can either be very shallow or even dry out. On the seaward side of Muck island a very strong tide race runs – particularly at the southern end of the island and can create a steep sea even in light winds. There is a great population of cliff-nesting seabirds that can be seen on the east side of the island from April to July, and landing is discouraged on this nature reserve to prevent disturbance. There are more fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and some puffins south along the rugged basalt cliffs known as The Gobbins. The remains of an adventurous Victorian-built path can be seen along the base of part of these cliffs and it is hoped that this will be restored and re-opened again in the future. In calm conditions, there are also several sea caves worth exploring.

The route to Carrickfergus in Belfast Lough passes under Blackhead lighthouse, linked by a coast path to the attractive seaside town of **Whitehead** with its colourful seafront houses and slipways at Clachan Rock (Whitehead Harbour) and County Antrim Yacht Club. Amongst other facilities, boat storage is available by prior arrangement at the Yacht Club's beautifully restored boathouse - once part of the old Coastguard station. Huge salt deposits lie below this north shore of Belfast Lough and mining has been in operation for about 150 years. Every year, half a million tonnes of rock salt, mainly used for de-icing, is extracted from a sloping mine or adit below Kilroot and deep under the seabed.

Another power station looms at Kilroot. From here it is just a short paddle to **Carrickfergus** where landing can be made at the Harbour, or beyond at the Yacht Club by prior arrangement. For a small charge canoeists can also use Carrickfergus Marina amenities nearby. The Norman castle at the harbour is well worth a visit.





### **Crossing Belfast Lough**

Although it is possible to make the crossing of Belfast Lough from almost any location along the shore, the advised crossing point for paddlers on the canoe trail is between Carrickfergus Castle and Grey Point, a distance of 3NM. This imaginary line marks the northern limit of Belfast Harbour controlled waters, within which shipping runs predictably on course along the Victoria Channel, marked by red and green light-beacons and buoys towards Belfast Harbour and approximately 250 metres wide at this point. The large red and white stripped Fairway buoy marks the start of the channel. Outside of the Harbour boundary shipping diverges and it becomes impossible for canoeists to predict the course of large vessels. Canoeists are advised to contact Belfast Harbour Port Control, ideally by VHF radio Channel 12, or by phone, before setting off to cross the Lough.

### Grey Point to Donaghadee (9NM) and the Copeland Islands

(8NM return journey from Donaghadee)

Crossing Belfast Lough to **Grey Point** on the County Down shore is a relatively short distance but geologically a span of over 200 million years to the much older Ordovician greywacke rocks and attractively indented coast of wooded headlands and sandy beaches leading to the town of Bangor.

Grey Point Fort, set above the shore, with its two massive gun emplacements and, nearer the sea, three small searchlight buildings, was a battery established in 1904-07. It provided protection to Belfast Lough for many years, notably in World War Two. The present guns are replacements of the originals, brought from County Cork in 1993. Managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, it is open to

Helen's Bay beach makes a pleasant resting spot and beach access is available at the next sandy stretch at **Crawfordsburn Country Park**, which has pleasant woodland walks, a cafe and an information centre. Paddlers setting off from here should note the park's restricted opening hours.

the public and has very interesting historical displays.

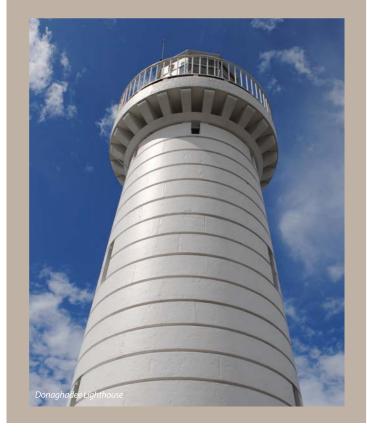
By-pass Bangor Harbour and marina (no agreed access) and come ashore, by prior arrangement, at **Ballyholme** Yacht Club just past Luke's Point. Across the bay is the National Trust's Ballymacormick Point, with a rest point near Jenny's Island. Grey and common seals may be about, and this is a good bird-watching headland, with many shorebirds, as well as songbirds amongst the whins and other scrub. Eider ducks are numerous in the seaward part of Belfast Lough, up to 2000 wintering between Carrickfergus and Donaghadee.



At the entrance to the bay at **Groomsport** is the tiny National Trust-owned Cockle Island, a nesting reserve for arctic and sandwich terns and gulls. Landing is not permitted here during the breeding season (April-August inclusive). History was made at Groomsport in 1689 when the Duke of Schomberg and his army landed here, to go on to join William of Orange at Carrickfergus and thence to the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, a landmark encounter in Ireland's history. Small coves and rocky points lead south to **Donaghadee**, where the landing is available at the slipway and dinghy park just short of the harbour. Just across the road from the slipway is the Donaghadee Sailing Club where, for a small fee, canoeists can use visitor facilities by prior arrangement.

Settled in pre-Christian times, Donaghadee was an important landing for Scots settlers arriving in the seventeenth century. It has a long sea-faring and lifeboat tradition and the harbour today is one of the most attractive on the Irish coast, and is much visited and photographed.

Awkward tidal conditions at Groomsport make Donaghadee the preferred embarkation point for a visit to the Copeland Islands, the closest being Copeland itself 1.5 NM offshore and the most seaward, Mew Island, lying 1NM beyond this. Tidal streams in Donaghadee Sound can reach 4.5 knots and there are strong currents around all three islands, so the trip is only recommended for experienced and competent paddlers who have a good working knowledge of coastal and open water navigation. The tide race off the back of Mew island known as the Ram Race can produce a particularly rough sea.





Norsemen used the main island to trade from and its title Kaupmannaeyjar meaning "Merchants' Isle" may have led to the present Copelands name. This island was occupied and farmed until 1953 and today the few homes are temporary residences, with seasonal farming continuing.

Despite its name, Lighthouse Island doesn't have a lighthouse on it, whilst the adjacent Mew Island (which does have a lighthouse) has a long-established bird observatory, famous for its breeding colony of Manx shearwaters. These are pigeon-sized black and white seabirds that wander the oceans for eight months of the year, coming ashore only at night to nest in burrows between May and August. Ringing the shearwaters here has shown that the oldest is over fifty years of age. Skimming the waves, these birds are familiar to summer seafarers around this part of the coast. Canoeists are advised to seek relevant permissions before landing on any of the Copeland Islands.

# Donaghadee to Portaferry (26NM)

Donaghadee to Cloughey is the caravan and cottage coast, proving that we do indeed like to be beside the sea. From Cloughey south to Ballyquintin Point and the Strangford Narrows is a less developed and more scenic area. This final section is a long one and there are opportunities to break the journey at various slipways, beaches and resting spots. The Irish Sea can throw up very choppy paddling conditions when there's a strong wind, especially a south-east blow. The tide is relatively strong along this coast with rates of 3 knots off islands and headlands – so working with the tide is important. Navigation too can add challenge to the journey as the low-lying nature of the peninsula offers little to aid this.

Once a common sight on the Ards Peninsula, remains of windmills are visible on small hills here and there along this stretch of coastline. The flour-milling village of **Millisle** developed around some of these and today it is a popular seaside resort. Woburn House, built in 1860, is a notable landmark just to the south.

The hinterland was long recognised for its fertile soils and is now intensively farmed with pastures and silage swards enclosed by trimmed hedges. It may seem a less dramatic landscape than the Antrim coast but it has a long and sometimes turbulent history, covering early Ecclesiastical sites, Viking raids, settlement by the castle-building Normans and then the Scots. The small village of **Ballyhalbert** had a busy and strategic airfield during World War Two. Tourism and the holiday home business now dominate, but fishing and a busy cottage industry of linen embroidery supported many communities in the past. Fishing continues along the whole coast on a small scale, with a larger fleet of prawn and whitefish trawlers and some scallop dredgers at **Portavogie**. Canoeists should avoid the busy commercial harbour here and opt instead for access at the beach just to

the north.



The rocky reefs and islets known as pladdies are most numerous from Millisle to a little south of Portavogie and reoccur in the Strangford Narrows. They are more obvious at low water, sometimes with seals hauled out and cormorants standing like black scarecrows, wings held out to dry. A few larger pladdies form offshore reefs and others are higher, creating islands closer to shore, some with nesting seabirds in spring and summer. Given the right conditions, paddlers can enjoy some interesting rockdodging through the pladdies. The gathering of dulse, a small reddish seaweed, is a popular occupation, and lines of this edible plant may be seen drying on the upper shore and on sea walls and piers.

Just beyond Ballyhalbert Harbour is Burr Point, the easternmost point of mainland Northern Ireland. Burial Island sits just off the point, separated by a narrow channel. South of the long sandy beach of **Cloughey**, the coast is different. Rounded hills or drumlins add variety to the scenery, and the shores are more convoluted, with numerous hidden bays that are worth exploring. **Kearney** is an attractive cluster of National Trust cottages – there's a beach haul out by the most northerly one – and the Trust's information building in one of the unoccupied dwellings provides a comprehensive history of the area, including the old south rock light visible offshore. Just around the corner to the south, Knockinelder Bay is noted for its ancient Silurian (420 million years old) rock formations. It's impossible not to notice the romantic looking Quintin Castle (private) at the south end of this sweep of shore, originally an early seventeenth century tower house but rebuilt and enlarged to a castle in the 1870s.

Travelling south toward Ballyquinton Point, landing is possible at **Port Kelly**. This shore area is a good spot to find spring and summer seashore flowers and to spot the colourful shelduck, various shorebirds and to hear the songs of warblers and the resident reed buntings.

The nature reserves at Ballyquintin Point and Bar Hall Bay are noted for seals, shorebirds and wildfowl. Terns, gannets, cormorants, shags and black guillemots come and go offshore and seek fish in the turbulence of the narrows. It is said approximately 350 million tonnes of seawater enter and exit Strangford Lough with the tide every six hours. This challenging neck of the fjord, which includes a tidal whirlpool, is not for the inexperienced canoeist, and the effect of the ebb tide is more challenging than the flood. The pros and cons of navigating this tide race are already covered well in both the Strangford Lough and South East Coast Canoe Trail guides. **Portaferry** village is a picturesque and welcoming end to this long paddle, and is

also well described in the above publications.

# Tidal Information

The following is a brief overview of the tidal information for the area of coastline covered in this guide. All information is given in relation to High Water Belfast (HWB). Paddlers must refer to the Irish Coast Pilot, Tidal Stream Atlas or relevant Admiralty Chart for

detailed tidal information when journey planning. Belfast Tide Tables are available free of charge at Port of Belfast, www.belfast-harbour.co.uk News.bbc.co.uk/weather also provides tidal information with a free

6 day tide prediction service for all UK standard and secondary ports. The main flood tide runs south through the North Channel along this

### stretch of the east coast of Northern Ireland North of Belfast Lough

For the most part tidal streams set in the direction of the coast at a maximum Spring rate of 2 knots. Contrary eddies take effect on

flood and/or ebb tides along much of the coastline as follows: Between Cushendun Bay and Garron Point – during the northgoing stream a south-going eddy begins, setting east along the northern shore of Garron Point headland. During the south-going stream a weaker north-going eddy sets in a reverse direction.

 Between Garron Point and Ballygally Head - Contrary eddies take effect on both north and south-going tides. • South east of the Isle of Muck, during the greater part of the south-going stream an eddy sets north along the coast, resulting in the north going stream running for 10 ¾ hours. North west of

the Isle of Muck an eddy sets south east during the second half of the main north-going stream. A strong tide race runs at the south east end of the island. Tidal streams set across the entrance to Larne Lough between

Skernaghan Point and Black Cave Head . Inside the Lough they set

in approximately the direction of the channel. In the vicinity of The Maidens tidal streams are strong (4 kn

#### Springs) and complex. **Belfast Lough**

Tidal streams run strongly across the mouth of the Lough but rarely exceed 1 knot Springs within the Lough. Here tides run mainly in the direction of the Lough, however at the mid point, between Kilroot Point and Grey Point, the stream is rotary in a clockwise direction. On the south shore, east of Grey Point, streams are weak and affected by eddies. Gales blowing into the Lough from the east or south east can be dangerous, resulting in heavy seas.

# South of Belfast Lough

With the exception of the Copeland Islands, tidal streams along the eastern shore of the Ards Peninsula follow the general direction of the coast at a maximum rate of 2.5 knots. Contrary eddies form along the coastline as follows:

 Between Donaghadee and Ballyferris Point an eddy sets north along the coast during the second half of the south-going stream, resulting in the north-going stream running for 9 hrs. In Ballyhalbert bay a south-going eddy forms in the bay during the second half of the north-going stream.

Tidal streams around the Copeland Islands are strong (4.5 knots in Springs) and complex, often producing violent overfalls and very challenging conditions. Two powerful tide races run in turn east and north of the islands, these are the Ram Race and the North Race.

Tidal streams are strong and complex at the entrance to Strangford Lough. Within the Narrows tidal streams begin nearly simultaneously and run at rates up to 7.5 knots in Springs creating boils, whirlpools and challenging paddling conditions.